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FM AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 8548
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 0720
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 0224
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 1923
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 0666
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 0246

UNCLAS ASHGABAT 000301

SIPDIS

STATE FOR INR/R/MR, IIP/T, IIP/G/NEA-SA, SA
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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN GOVERNMENT LIMITS COVERAGE OF POST EVENTS IN
FEBRUARY

REFS: (A) Ashgabat 215, (B) Ashgabat 216

SUMMARY

1. (U) State media gave broad positive coverage on Assistant
Secretary Richard A. Boucher's meeting with President

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Berdimuhamedov on February 15, both on state TV and print media.
However, host government's effort to ban local coverage of A/S
Boucher's appearance at the Turkmenabat Pedagogical Institute was
successful. Host government also stalled on publication of an
article about the full range of embassy's exchange programs in the
country. End Summary.

Omission of Post-Conducted Events on Boucher's Visit

2. (U) Regardless of post's efforts to facilitate coverage of
Assistant Secretary Boucher's February 16 visit to Turkmenabat City
in Lebap Province, and his press briefing with journalists, state
media omitted both of the events. (Comment: Post also sent
transcripts from both of the events to the state news agency and
made continuous efforts to coordinate journalists' attendance in
Turkmenabat through Turkmenistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. End
Comment.)

Local Journalist Favorably but Inappropriately Presents Article on
U.S. Exchange Programs

3. (U) On February 14, a local journalist from the state daily
"Neutral Turkmenistan" newspaper (Russian, circ. 34,701) posted an
article about the embassy's exchange programs on the
government-owned Russian language website:
<http://www.turkmenistan.gov.tm/> "XXI vek-zolotoy vek Turkmenistana"
(21 century-golden century of Turkmenistan). The author favorably
and accurately used post-supplied background materials. However,
the author inappropriately presented the embassy FSN, the
journalist's point of contact, as if he had given an interview, in
spite of the fact that post specifically requested that the FSN not
be cited. Post requested that any subsequent print version remove
references to the FSN. Additionally, post submitted a dipnote to
support article's publication in state print outlets - please clear
up this language, I'm confused by what happened here. Nevertheless,
the government is still considering the issue. (Comment: The

article was the author's own initiative, but was prompted by the new president's support for exchange programs. End Comment.)

COMMENT

14. (SBU) In[B1] contrast to other steps towards reform in Turkmenistan, there have been no public decrees or pronouncements about creating a more open media environment. Overall, the month of February was evidence that old habits continued to prevail. It is noteworthy that events and press coverage thus far in March (septel) have provided small but significant signs of greater openness in the state-controlled media. End Comment.

BRUSH

Drafted: IMA MHummedov

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Cleared: PAO

[B1] Be careful of platitudes, that's why I deleted the sentence below.